

INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES

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Telephone:
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Subject:

Summary

*Submission to the NSW Legislative Council
INQUIRY INTO PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADES
18th August 2005, by Ian Duncan & Bernard Grinberg*

1. EXPANSION OF STUDY AREA

1.1 It is our understanding that there was a very widespread community support for the expansion of the study area (both East and West) of the original study area.

1.2 This view was clearly expressed at all the community meetings held by RTA (Bangalow, Ewingsdale, and Newrybar). In addition we understand that there were numerous submissions to this effect.

1.3 The Community Liaison Group voted to have the area expanded with an overwhelming majority.

1.4 The objections to the expansion since have come from many who likely would not have objected had it been expanded in the other direction (West).

1.5 In addition it is our view that RTA did not expand the study area solely due to community requests, but also to the fact that when they undertook their original investigations it became apparent to them that there would be significant technical and economic problems with potential route options in the original study area.

1.6 This decision to expand the study area would also been influenced by the need to find an acceptable solution to the deadly and noise generating 9 % slope on St. Helena Hill – the only practical one being a road tunnel.

1.7 There have been 34 highway accidents in the T2E Pacific Highway segment since New Years Day. 21 of them in the section Bangalow to St. Helena (Proposed Route B Modified) These 21 involved 2 deaths and 8 injured (2 very serious), none of these involved trucks - just sedans and motorbikes, although some may have been indirectly caused by trucks.

1.8 The previous (and unacceptable) options for St Helena involved a cantilevered viaduct construction which would increase environmental and safety problems. It does not take much imagination why the RTA is now not keen to pursue such options. These options were all investigated & designed almost 8 years ago, well prior to the opening of Yelgun to Chinderah, and the influx of large numbers of trucks.

1. ROUTE SELECTION

2.1 The plateau section of the study area is a relatively well populated area with intensive horticulture and other development. In particular the area adjacent to the existing Pacific Highway has been the focus of dwellings and horticulture and tourism

2.2 There are about 110 dwellings adjacent to the highway and 30 local access roads.

2.3 In addition there are a number of adjacent population clusters including the significant ones Bangalow (1,500 population), Newrybar village and the local school for the area.

2.4 The area's largest tourist attraction – Macadamia Castle tourist facility and nature park with 350,000 visitors per annum is adjacent to the highway at Knockrow.

2.5 The main horticultural developments on the plateau are 2,000 hectares of macadamias with an annual gross farm gate value of \$28 million. These plantations and accompanying residences and facilities are in many cases adjacent to the highway.

2.6 Any attempt to build the new highway on top of and immediately adjacent to the existing Pacific Highway is impractical from a technical view as most of the telecommunications, power and mains water infrastructure would require relocation.. It would require the diversion of the Pacific Highway traffic during the construction period and cause the maximum negative impact on the maximum number of local residents and businesses.

2.7 These negative impacts will come from traffic noise (mainly road freight which will increase 200 % by 2015, massive severance to dwellings, local traffic access problems and visual impacts.

2.8 Utilising the existing corridor for the new road would cause significant property severance problems as a majority of the dwellings are located near the highway and also maximum traffic disruption during the construction phase of at least two years.

2.9 The "leave it in the current corridor" view is totally incompatible with the clearly stated RTA aim of building a "no-exit", toll capable, 6 lane superhighway while fully maintaining the current road for local access.

2.10 A new highway built in close vicinity to the old highway will leave a "dead zone" strip of land – the combination of old and new highway with a wasteland in between resulting in a perhaps 500 metre path across the landscape. It would most likely have a significant visual impact on the landscape with extra left turn joinings lanes, right turn flyovers for the existing 88 private accesses and 30 feeder roads, potentially a full interchange complete with yellow night lights, parallel access roads, and noise walls which will be necessary to reduce noise for existing dwellings.

2.11 Other potential routes on the plateau are likely to cause significant severance issues to many farming properties, most potential alignments would go through the middle of perhaps the most densely farmed macadamia area in Australia, In addition some alignments could cause risk to the water catchment for Emigrant Creek – source of 15 % to 20 % of the Ballina district water supply.

2.12 The eastern section of the study has significantly less population and intensive development. The area is predominantly a sugar cane producing area with relatively very small population clusters.

2.13 However the area also has scenic value as it forms a backdrop from the Newrybar escarpment area.

2.14 The main community concern of a potential route in this area relates to distant visual and noise impacts.

2.15 An Eastern route would cause some property severance but the number of dwellings impacted is relatively small compared to that in the current corridor.

2.15 The argument that the current corridor residents should suffer more as they are already suffering is not valid as many of these people have had their land for a long time (generations in many cases) and the old highway was a relatively quiet one without the volumes of traffic and trucks with compression brakes.

2.16 The RTA aim of eliminating the large number of "at grade" intersections with the major route should be commended as the absolutely safest option. The previous solutions such as the Tyagarah section are definitely not nearly as safe.

2.17 Given that it is very likely that the big trucks are here to stay, and roads will be built for them, solutions like Yelgun to Chinderah are far more appropriate. This includes safe and quick routes, bypassing most of the clustered communities at a good distance, leaving the old highways as scenic regional & local access roads.

2.18 With a new route well away from them, the larger communities along the old bypassed highway would very likely experience an economic benefit such as the Burringbar Ranges area has received due to a much more pleasant living & tourist environment.

2.19 We acknowledge that there are no easy potential route options for the RTA that will be pain free and avoid causing problems for the local community and business. This is clearly exacerbated if all the heavy vehicles stay on the Pacific Highway, which appears likely.

2.20 The RTA will consider the route options for technical issues as regards buildability and cost which could be considered the core inputs. Much of this will be determined by topography etc.

2.21 In so far as applying the discretionary criteria such as the impact on local social, economic and environmental issues we believe that RTA must follow one guiding principle. ***This principle must be to select that route option that has the lowest overall negative impact on the whole community.*** To do anything else would be unacceptable and will be seen as pandering to special interests.

Respectfully submitted by:

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